

## [Frank March]

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Phipps, Woody

Rangelore

Tarrant Co., Dist. #7 [89?]

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Frank March, 48, was born on Jeff Singleton's, his grandfather, ranch in Borden co. Texas. Frank learned to ride at an early age, and took the place of a regular cowhand at 10 Yrs. At 18, he was employed by the [Tahoka Land & Cattle Co., as a top hand. He attended a railroad celebration at 23, and quit the range for more such celebrations. He has been with the Ft. Worth Stock Yards since he was 23, and now resides at Lake Worth. His story:

“While I'm not as old as some of the old trail hands, I feel I've experienced some of the conditions you want to know about. I was born right on the West Texas range before they had many houses out there. In fact, I was born in a dugout on September the 10th, 1889, in Borden county, Texas.

“My grandfather ran a big ranch of about 30,000 head. His brand was the 'A Triangle'. To make it, you first burn the A, then burn a triangle after it. His name was Jeff Singleton, and he was a great Indian fighter. I recall many nights spent in the old dugout while I are just a kid, and hearing him tell about his experiences with the Indians. If I could remember them now, you'd be able to write a book as big in that there, 'Gone With The Wind'.

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"I will tell you about something that happened to him while I was a kid. Him and Jim Fridge, who later owned a pretty good size ranch in Sheckelford county, was out hunting strays. Jim was working as a regular cow hand at that time and granddad was short of hands so he was out with him. Well, they come across an Indian that must have been scouting the place because he was by himself and pretty [?]. He must have known all the tricks of Indian warfare because he got/ grand dad to shoot all his shells from his six shooter without one hit, then charged. When grandad saw the Indian had him, he mounted 2 his hoss and took out after Jim, who had run off when he first saw the Indian. Jim's mount wasn't so hot, and granddad had about the most hossflesh in that country so he could outride either the Indian or Jim.

The Indian almost won the battle because he shot an arrow and it hit granddad in the back, and almost on his back bone. He rode on with that arrow in his back 'til he caught Jim, had Jim work the arrow out of his back, took his six shooter away from him, rode back to the Indian and killed him. This didn't do much damage to grandad either because he died of old age in 1919.

"As I said, this Indian must have been a scout because a trail hand came through, going over into New Mexico to trail drive a herd for the [Hat?] Ranch, and said he'd seen Indian sign to the Northeast. This meant that a troupe of Indians were in our section, and nine chances out of ten, they weren't there for any good. We expected that they were on the warpath so everybody that went anywhere, carried all the guns and shells they could find room for.

"One day, it was necessary for all the hands and granddad to be away from the [dquarters?] so they asked my grandmother to go with them. She had some clothes to wash and clean so she refused by saying, 'Reckon as how I been taking care of myself for a long time so I guess I'll take my chances right here'.

"They'd been keeping me tied up out in the yard with a long leather string harness that they fixed to my shoulders like I've seen dogs in the park since then. She took me inside and let me play around for awhile. All of a sudden, she grabbed me and stuck me under a box we usually kept full of kindling. Then she said, 'If you let out a peep, the Indians will get you and cut your hair off 3 right down to the skin. Then you'll freeze to death'. I heard her open the door, lock it, pick up a board in the roof of the dugout, and come back in. Years later, I heard her telling about it and she said that she saw the Indians coming, hid me, then went out and locked the door on the outside, leaving the key in the door, picked up the board I spoke of, and got back into the dugout, hiding in a closet where the ammunition and guns were kept. She heard the Indians ride up to the door, walk around awhile, then ride off. We all thought that when they seen the key in the door, they just figured that the folks were gone but not very far, and were afraid to burn the place because that would bring all the hands and they'd have a little trouble.

"You know, the kids of nowadays look forward to Christmas and all the holidays. I looked forward to the Spring and Fall trips to the closest trading post. Abilene, Texas, was the closest for awhile, and that meant a 10 day trip, allowing for a days or so to hang around town and find out about what the other ranges were doing. I didn't get to go because there was always the danger of somebody holding you up, drowning in swollen streams, or getting lost. I kept watch for the wagons, and when I saw them coming, I'd alarm everybody, get my pony, Prince, and go to meet them.

"These [wagonswould?] be loaded with barrels and sacks of grub but I looked for just one thing. Under all the sacks, I'd always find a sack of candy. They always bought the candy first, and put it on the bottom so I'd be willing to help unload what I could carry before I'd take off with my prize. The barrels would be filled with whiskey, syrup, and any liquid stuff, and the sacks would be coffee, sugar, flour, and what could be carried in sacks. 4 They tried to carry everything they could in sacks. The barrels in those days weren't so hot. They'd come to pieces after so long a trip across a rocky trail. They were banded together

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by wooden bands, whereas, the barrels of today are banded [by?] strips of steel. The barrels were half a hogshead, and a hogshead. The hogshead barrels were a whole lot bigger than those of today.

"I used to be pretty tough as a kid. One of the things I'd do 'til the barrels were all broke up, was to get in one and roll down a hill. I saw Prince at the bottom of the hill one day, and tried to aim the barrel so's I'd roll under him and give him a big scare. I got in and got started, bug I didn't figure on Prince seeing me and turning around. He turned his tail toward the barrel, and at the right time, kicked back. The barrel was just kicked to pieces with that one kick, and it was the worst scared kid in that part of the country. It was lucky for me that I was so fixed in the barrel at the time of the kick that he didn't hurt me.

"I was never allowed to go on the rondups because the cattle scattered all over the country. There wasn't a fence in that part of the country except where a man had a garden or so, of had a remuda corral so the only thing that stopped the critters was grass and water, and shelter when the weather got cold. In those days, the grass grew as high as a man's knees. [?] stopped the grass was when the cowmen stopped burning the mesquites down, and the mesquites took the country over.

"My work 'til I was about 13, was right around the ranch headquarters. I took the place of a yard boss and 'tended to the hosses, the few milk cows; and brought in the wood when needed.

"After I was 13, about the only home I ever knew was around 5 the chuck wagon more than nine months of the year. My only recreation was in shooting, riding and roping. I learned to shoot a rabbit or anything else while in a fast ride. I learned to rope the same way because it was necessary on the range to know these things. I never did get to go to town when they went after rations because they were always short a hand with the work.

"This thing of living around a chuck wagon gets monotonous but if you don't know anything else, you don't mind it so bad. Our food was cooked by old Jim, an ex-slave nigger that

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was the only nigger I ever saw 'til I was 23 years old. He was a quite old cuss, just like all the rest of the fellows my granddad hired. They'd set around, all hunkered up and smoke by the hour when they weren't working. I later found out that my granddad had warned them not to talk about the outlaws and rustlers and different places they'd been in order not to get my feet itching to go someplace. It worked because I never did crave to go any place. I didn't care about going to town after they told me that they needed men to take care of the cattle and I was a man now.

“Our food was mostly, beans, sour-dough biscuits, or 'Sinkers' black coffee, and beef or antelope. According to what the cook had to give us. The antelope ran in herds and I've seen over 500 in one herd. The way we'd do was to shoot a number of them and cure the meat so it'd keep. The cook made what we called, 'Jerk'. It was antelope meat after it had been dried, and cut into strips. Then we thought we would be out all day, we'd take several strips of it in our pockets, and when we got hungry, we'd cut off a piece like you do tobacco, and stick it into our mouth. We'd chew this 'til the taste left it, spit it out and get another chew. It wasn't as good as setting down to eat a meal but it had going hungry beat a mile.

“Most ranches had special hosses for different parts of the cow work but we trained all our hosses to do any part of the work, some hosses wouldn't pick the work up so well, and granddad would sell them off with the Fall market roundup. The hosses that stood the test had to know how to trail a critter through the herd, stop and set down when the noose was about to drop on the critter's head after the waddy had thrown it, and other tricks that an ordinary hoss will naturally pick up.

“The hoss buster was a man who really know his hosses. There was a Dapple Gray stallion that ran with a herd of wild mustangs and sired all the wild hosses on the place. He was bought for the purpose of breeding these Mustangs, and all the Mustang stallions were trapped and sold off.

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"When I said, 'Trapped', it might have sounded like they built a trap but the business of getting these hosses was to chase them for three or four days. The hosses would travel in a circle around where they were used to eating and drinking and hanging out. The hoss buster of course, was extra weight on his hoss and he couldn't possibly hope to catch a wild hoss but he'd have men at different parts of the circle with relay hosses. That is, the buster would chase the wild herd 'til he neared a man with another hoss, then he'd give the man his hoss, mount the other hoss and take up the chase again. This way, the hosses would be without water and food for three days or so, and they'd be less wary of a trap. Then, the buster would get help, and they'd drive the herd into a blind canyon, a canyon that only had one entrance, and when these hosses 7 come to the end of the canyon, a man that had stayed there for this purpose, would close up the way out. The [hosss?] would then find that they'd been trapped in a corral. They'd mill wildly around, then the Stallion, who always led the herd, would discover the way they come in, and he'd call the mares to him. Since he was such good hossflesh, he'd be able to jump the corral but most of the others wouldn't be able to do it. When they did, and one of them happened to be the one that the hoss buster wanted, he'd crease it. That is, he'd shoot the hoss at the base of the mane just behind it's ears. That would numb the muscle at the top of the neck, and the hoss wouldn't be able to move for long enough to let the hoss wrangler hog tie it so it couldn't move 'til they were ready for it to move.

"Because I could use a rope good, I was always used to tie the hosses after they'd been creased. One time, after I'd begged so hard to get them to let me crease one, I was allowed to do the creasing. Well, I creased but too low, so I killed the hoss and it was a beaut. I never got another chance to crease another one.

"The hosses were always busted right there where they were bought. This was necessary because if they got away before they were busted, all the work would be wasted. After the hoss wrangler got them pretty well busted, I was allowed to finish the job. I was known as, 'Bronc', because I busted so many [?]. That nick name didn't follow me though.

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"By the time I was 18 years old, I'd become a regular top cow hand and was a fair hoss wrangler. I had a string of eight hosses in the ramuda that were as good as the best to be found any where. The reason they were so good was because I broke them in myself and I'd never lost a hoss by accident. I said by accident 8 I never lost a hoss by any means. The way most hosses went on the range was to step in a gopher hole while on the run, and break it's leg, [or get ?] gored by a steer, or kicked in the head by some critter.

"All this time, I'd been overhearing some of the hands talking about other ranches before they knew I was around. I knew by their actions that I wasn't supposed to hear what they said, so that just made me more interested. I finally grew to know that the [?] Land and Cattle company had a big ranch to the Northwest of our place, and I asked my [folks?] to let me go up there for a spell. They refused, then I made up my mind to go anywhere I wanted to at anytime. Well, my folks were as stubborn as I was, and they ended up by saying I could go anywhere I wanted to as long as I didn't take anything away that belonged to the ranch. That stopped me 'til I saved up about \$40.00, and bought a good hoss from a roving cow hand.

"The day I left the old home place, All the folks were standing on the front porch of the house that had been built in the meantime, and I was riding away on a hoss without a saddle, or anything but the clothes that covered my back. I don't think I'd have been so determined to stick with it if I hadn't have overheard my granddad and my dad saying that I wouldn't stick with it because I'd never been away from the home range.

"When I reached the place I mentioned, which was really called the 'T Bar'. That was their brand, and you make it by first making a T, then making a bar after it like this, after I'd been there long enough to make the Spring roundup, I found out that the T Bar was so big that it covered the territory that is now Lynn, Perry, and Yoakum counties. The roundup even went as far as 9 Bronco, New Mexico. The headquarters were where the city of Tahoka, Texas, is now. Old Bill Patty was ram [rodding?] the spread for the company, and he was one of the best all around cow punchers in that section of the country. He had to

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be for it was such a big spread. His job must have been kind of like the President of the United States is because the ram rods on that spread didn't live very long after taking the reigns over. I use to know about four men's names who were foremen over the spread, and died several years after taking over.

Besides handling from 30 to a 100 punchers, they had to keep track of from 100,000 to 200,000 head of cattle, manage trail drives to different sections of the United States, and all the different details. Now, I don't now whether the job killed them or not. I just know they died like I said they did.

The conditions I spoke of as being on my granddad's ranch were the same on the T Bar. The roundups were pretty much the same, the hosses were handled the same, the branding and the Fall shipping the same, the staying away from the ranch the same except we had dugouts in different places where we could go if the weather was very bad. Just think of it! Nine months of the year when you didn't see hide nor hair of the headquarters. You saw the ram rod, yes. You saw the foremen, yes. What you didn't see was any signs of civilization. I put in five years on the Bar with about the same routine.

"We boys began to hearing rumors from one, then another about the rail road was coming to our section of the country. Well, I knew men who were 60 and 70 years old who had never seen a train, nor even tracks. I was 23 there, and had never seen all this so my 10 curiosity was aroused a-plenty. We finally got word that the railroad was going to have a big dance and barbecue when the end of the line reached O'Donnell, Texas. Well, that was all I wanted to know. A dance and a barbecue! I just made up my mind that I intended to be there for the doings.

"One big day, word came out that all the boys that wanted to go could take off with pay. Boy!, what a day? We boys from the T Bar made quite a company when we got to O'Donnell. We looked like Cox's Army. Every one of us had his glad rags on and were



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ready to play. After we got there, we found quite a few there from the other places. At the end of the day, there was at least 5,000 people there.

“All the surrounding ranches had even sent their chuck wagons in, and the railroad had a dancing pavilion built. Tons of meat was barbecued in advance but not near enough for they had to barbecue every day. If some loose ropers came through the country at that time, they could have sure took many a head with them.

“Of course, there were quite a good many drunks but they were handled in a way that would make a Western officer's heart turn pen green with envy. A fellow by the name of Buck Teagle, who was one of the best shots in the country, weighed about 175 pounds but could throw any man he'd ever met in a fair wrestling match, and I guess in a foul too, who was made a peace officer by the one armed J.P. The J.P. was an old man who was given that place because they never needed a law in the town 'til the day of the barbecue proved they'd have to have some kind of law. Old Buck had a system with him. He didn't want to hurt anybody because he wanted to live there after the doings was over. Truth of the matter was, that he'd been rail roaded into the job. The J.P. just deputized him and if 11 he'd have refused, he'd have been violating the law. It wasn't fair but Buck had a rule that he'd tackle anything once, so he took it over. He made the J.P. buy him about 300 foot of the strongest lasso rope in the town, then cut it into 10 foot pieces.

“When he found anybody drunk, he'd man handle them 'til he got them to a grove of saplings, tie their hands to the tree over their heads, then tie their feet to the base of the sapling. They'd hang there 'til they got sober enough to be taken down, then Buck would take them down. This stunt showed folks that drunks could be handled if a fellow used his head and was able to do what Buck was. Somebody in the crowd must have been able to write stories because a story about the barbecue and a picture of the drunks, about seven of them at one time, was shown in the Police Gazette, all hanging from the trees.

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"This week of fun spoiled my range career if I was due one because I took right out after the barbecue and dance to Fort Worth, and I've been here on the Stock Yards ever since. I thought that if a fellow could have that much fun at the end of the line, what could he do in the middle of the line. Truth of the matter is, I've never had so much fun anywhere as I had there that day at O'Donnell. I've had to work as hard, or harder to make a living right here. The only difference from this life, as I see it, you see lots of people, and they're all trying to dig you out of what you have if you have anything and if you don't have anything, they don't care anything about you.

"Out there in the open, you live the healthiest life a man could possibly live. You only ate the food that was good for you, and every man was for you. If you needed anything, you could have all that anybody had if it was necessary.